

**Testimony Regarding SB946, An Act Concerning Revenue Items to
Implement the Governor's Budget**

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Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

My name is Ruth Canovi. I am the Manager of Public Policy for the American Lung Association in Connecticut, a not-for-profit voluntary health organization dedicated to saving lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. I am here to express my strong opposition to the Governor's proposed elimination of the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund Transfer in the FY16/17 Budget.

While we certainly recognize the challenging budget climate our state faces, the American Lung Association was extremely disappointed to find that the Governor's budget proposal failed to supply any funds at all to the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund over the next two years. There has been a long history of using a majority of the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund money to plug budget holes in Connecticut and this has to stop. This year, Connecticut will receive over \$500M in tobacco taxes and Master Settlement dollars. It is unconscionable that the state wouldn't spend any of these dollars on helping the 70% of smokers who want to quit to do so successfully. A decision to provide \$0 in funding to combat the impact of the leading cause of preventable disease and death in this state and the nation will be detrimental to Connecticut's economic and public health.

The Tobacco and Health Trust Fund is a vital source for tobacco prevention and cessation program funding in the state. It is the only source of funding for the CT Quitline, which provides much needed services to CT residents who want to quit smoking. The Tobacco and Health Trust Fund Board has done an excellent job using their limited funds wisely to ensure high quality, evidence-based programs are funded to help smokers quit and prevent youth from leading a lifetime of nicotine addiction.

Not only is funding tobacco cessation and prevention programs just good public health policy, it is a wise investment. Tobacco costs Connecticut over \$2B in health care costs annually (over \$520M of which is covered by the state Medicaid program).ⁱ A study assessing the return on investment for the state of Washington's tobacco prevention and cessation program found that for every \$1 spent on the state tobacco program, they saw a \$5 savings on tobacco related hospitalization related costs. Another similar study done in Massachusetts found a 2:1 return on investment.ⁱⁱ This data makes you wonder what Connecticut could do for the health of our state with a consistent investment in tobacco prevention and cessation for our residents.

Many people think that tobacco is a public health issue of the past, but every day we continue to see losses in this fight. 4900 people die in CT from smoking each year.ⁱⁱⁱ Thousands of others will become replacement smokers. This year, we are funding tobacco control programs at

\$3.5M; we are currently being out spent \$22:1 by the tobacco industry. If we put zero resources towards counteracting all of the new products and messages being introduced to the market, what will that mean for the progress we have made in tobacco public health policy over the past fifteen years? We have seen a drop in the youth cigarette smoking rate recently, but we are now seeing youth move to the newer, cheaper and unregulated tobacco products, introducing many to nicotine addiction who would not have otherwise experienced it through smoking traditional cigarettes. We need to invest in educating youth as well as their parents and communities about these new products to ensure that the progress we have made in tobacco control policy and changing social norms around tobacco use is not undone.

Connecticut cannot once again be ranked last in the country in funding programs to help smokers quit and prevent youth from starting to use products we KNOW are the leading cause of preventable death and disease. That is not who we are. In the case of tobacco prevention and cessation, inaction has serious consequences. We can't afford to be penny wise and pound foolish. Too many lives are at stake.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We wish you the best in this challenging budgetary climate and hope we can work together to improve our state's public and economic health in the coming years by making smart investments to combat the effects of this dangerous and costly product.

Ruth Canovi
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ⁱ Toll of Tobacco in Connecticut. Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids.

http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/connecticut

ⁱⁱ Return on Investment from State Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Programs. Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0370.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, Broken Promises to Our Children: A State-by-State Look at the 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 16 Years Later Report. State by State Summaries.

http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/content/what_we_do/state_local_issues/settlement/FY2015/2014_12_11_brokenpromises_state_summaries.pdf